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PREHISTORIC ILLINOIS.

CERTAIN INDIAN MOUNDS TECHNICALLY CONSIDERED.

(Dr. J. F. Snyder.)

PART FIRST. THE EFFIGY MOUNDS.

[To adapt this paper to the limited space of the *Journal*, it has been divided into three parts, namely: The Effigy Mounds, Sepulchral and Memorial Mounds, and Temple or Domiciliary Mounds, which will appear in the order named, in three consecutive numbers of this publication. As a contribution to Illinois archaeology an example of each class of these local antiquities, not before figured or described in any public print, will be presented. But the main object of the paper is to attract attention of students to the rapidly disappearing remains of prehistoric Indian life and arts in Illinois, and aid (though feebly) in stimulating their interest in this sadly neglected substratum of Illinois history.—J. F. S.]

The custom of mound building by the North American Aborigines, coextensive with the limits of the United States from ocean to ocean, reached its highest perfection and longest duration on the eastern watershed of the Mississippi Valley, between the Great northern lakes and the Gulf of Mexico. And nowhere in that specified region were the earthen monuments of our Indian predecessors more numerous or more diversified than in the portion of it now comprised within the boundaries of Illinois. In this State occur every known type of prehistoric artificial mounds—the majestic sepulchral and memorial tumuli of high antiquity; the peculiar rock-lined graves and mounds of the “Stone Grave Indians”; the tribal ossuaries; the domiciliary, or temple, teocalli; signal, or observatory stations; elongate embankments, and the innumerable conical burial mounds of comparatively recent date.

Added to these, there are in four or five of the extreme northern counties of the State, a few of those strange earthen structures known as “effigy” mounds—the frontier outliers of the only area in the world where this class of imitative earthworks was so generally adopted for distinctive tribal symbols by a savage people. The geographical extent of that area is confined to the southern half of Wisconsin and the immediately adjoining portions of Iowa and Illinois.*

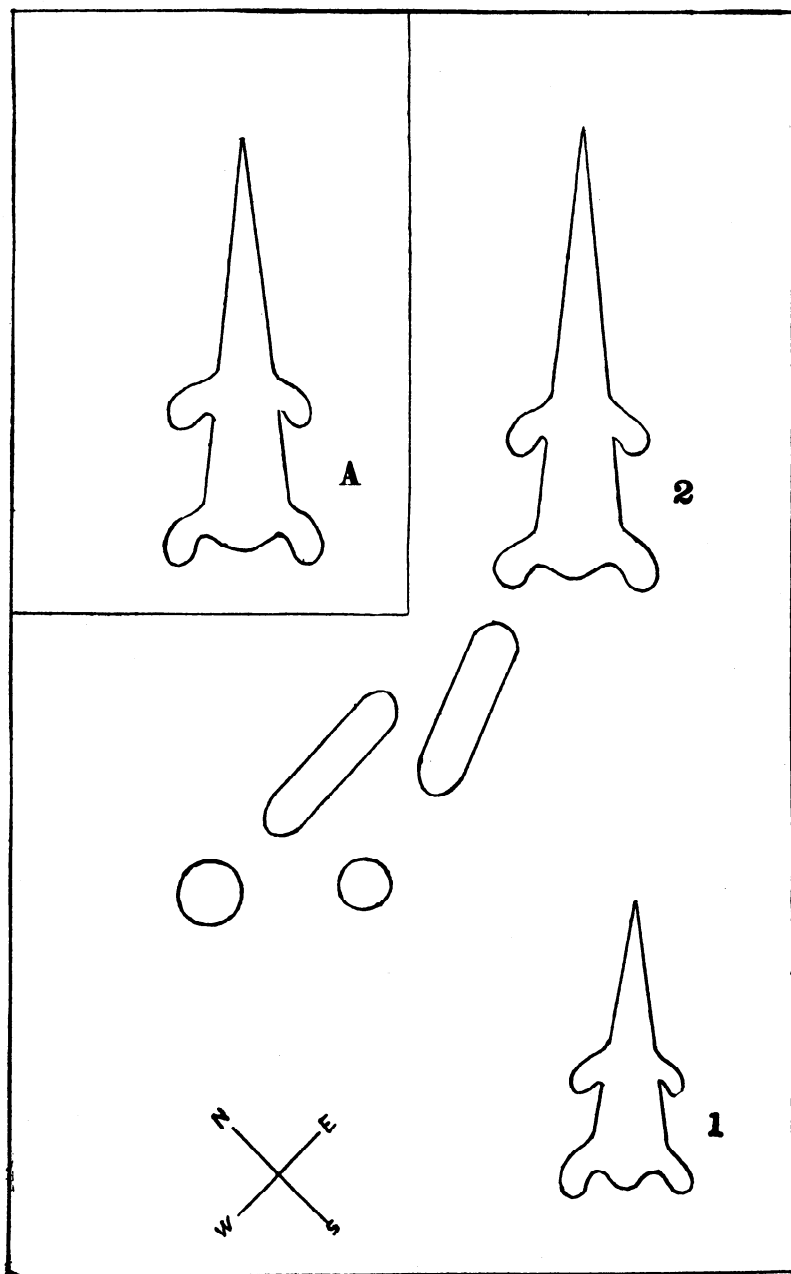
*Isolated effigy mounds elsewhere, as the great serpent mound in Adams county, Ohio, the two eagle mounds in Eastern Georgia, and some others, are well known, and are regarded as the sporadic work of different Indians actuated in their erection by different incentives.

The Wisconsin effigy mounds were designed to represent birds, reptiles, various local quadrupeds, and nondescript objects impossible to identify. They are often arranged in groups and generally associated with other mounds of the ordinary shapes and dimensions. Occasionally a solitary effigy mound is seen distant from any other, or among a number of common burial mounds; and in rare instances one of unusual figure is found alone on an elevated ridge or prominent bluff. They range in length from less than 50 to over 500 feet, and in height above the surface of the ground, from 1 to 6, or more, feet. Of the ordinary mounds that almost invariably accompany the effigies there is one more elevated than the others, and so situated relatively that from its summit is obtained a full perspective view of the image mound, or mounds, below, including every detail of proportion.

The first published mention of ancient earthworks in Wisconsin Territory, is found in the "Narrative of an Expedition to the Source of the St. Peter's River, etc., by Major Stephen H. Long, U. S. A., Philadelphia, 1824." But though Major Long gives interesting accounts of many Indian mounds he saw there in 1823, he strangely failed to observe that any of them were of unusual configuration and intended to resemble animated objects. That class of mounds were first brought to public notice in 1836 by Mr. I. A. Lapham in communications to newspapers descriptive of the "turtle mound" near Milwaukee, where he resided. Subsequently, in 1853-54, provided with the means by the American Antiquarian Society, he systematically surveyed almost the entire portion of Wisconsin containing the imitative earthworks. Mr. Lapham's report was published in 1855 by the Smithsonian Institution as one of its "Contributions to Knowledge." At that time the extension of those anomalous earthen effigies into Illinois had not been detected. And to this day—withstanding the proximity of several great institutions of learning to the limited number of those unique antiquities, long since discovered south of the Wisconsin line—no survey or exploration of them has yet been made, or comprehensive description of them written.

Cursory notices of some one of them occasionally appeared in newspapers, devoid, however, of information of value to the archæologist or antiquarian. The first published reference to them to attract the attention of scientists was the postscript to his geological survey of Winnebago county by the late Hon. James Shaw of Mt. Carroll, Carroll county, then Assistant State Geologist. He was intensely interested in all relics of the primitive American race, and a close observer of their numerous remains he found in the course of his field work, particularly in the valley of Rock river. In Winnebago county he "noticed and examined these classes of mounds," the prevailing type, being round at base and conical in form. "The oblong-shaped mound," he says, "is of much rarer occurrence. At the locality in Rockford already alluded to there is a very remarkable one. It is one hundred and thirty feet long, about twelve feet wide at the base and three or four feet high. Near by this one is a mound of the third class, or those having a fanciful resemblance to some

PLATE I.



form of animal life. In Rockford it is known as the 'Turtle mound.' But it resembles an alligator with his head cut off more than it does a turtle. We give its dimensions: Whole length, 150 feet; width, opposite fore legs, 50 feet; width, opposite hind legs, 39 feet; length of tail, from a point opposite hind legs to end of tail, 102 feet; length, from a point opposite hind to a point opposite fore legs, 33 feet; distance from opposite fore legs to where the neck should begin, 15 feet.

"These measurements were not made with exactness, but are simply paced-off guesses. The figure lies up and down the river, on a line about north and south, the tail extending northward. The body rises to a mound as high as a standing man. The feet and tail gradually extend into the greensward, growing less distinct and indefinable, until they cannot be distinguished from the surrounding sod. The measurements across the body at the legs include those appendages, which are only a few feet long.

"The effigy, whether of alligator, lizard or turtle, seems to be headless, and no depression in the surrounding soil would indicate that the materials out of which it is constructed were obtained in its immediate vicinity."*

The image mound thus described by Judge Shaw is shown in outline on Plate I, marked A. Two similar structures in the same county, represented and numbered 1 and 2 on Plate I, were reported and figured in *The Antiquarian*, in 1897, by George Stevens, and described as follows: They are "situated on the sandy, loam soil of Rock river bottom, five miles south of the city of Rockford. No. 2 is 192 feet long; the body 77 and the tail 115 feet. From one fore foot to the other is 62 feet, and the hind feet are 60 feet distant. The greater width of body, just below the front legs, is 60 feet. No. 1 is 110 feet in length and 30 feet wide at the broadest part of the body." No depression in the surface of the ground near these figures could be observed denoting from whence the material of which they are made was taken.†

In shape and general appearance these two effigies, identical in contour with the "lizard mound" in Rockford, are five feet high at the shoulders, and their tails point to the north. Near by them, as shown on the plate, are four ordinary mounds, two circular in form and two oblong.

At the time of their discovery these two "lizards" on the Rock river bottom were regarded as the extreme southern limit of the effigy mound system of Wisconsin. But two additional groups of them, farther east and fifty miles south of the Wisconsin state line, were found by Mr. T. H. Lewis, the well known archaeologist of St. Paul, Minn.—situated near the city of Aurora, in Kane county, on the eastern sloping terrace of Fox river, in latitude slightly lower than the mouth of the Chicago river, and but thirty-five miles west of it.

*Geological Survey of Illinois. A. H. Worthen, Director, 1873. Vol. V, page 94.

†The Antiquarian, Columbus, Ohio, 1897. Vol. 1, page 176.

They were 150 yards from the stream; and, as usual with the ancient works of that class, there were several mounds near them of the ordinary sort, as represented in outline on Plate II. The image figures are presumed to portray birds flying south—one of which is thought, by some strain of the imagination, to be the horned owl.

By carefully surveying the "bird" in group No. 2, Mr. Lewis ascertained its exact length to be 32 feet, and width, from tip to tip of its wings, 36 feet. Its elevation above the surface of the terrace was 18 inches. There was formerly another image of similar design and dimensions—a bird, also—a few yards in advance and a little east of it, which the white man's aggressive and destructive progress had almost completely obliterated. The bird figures in group No. 1 were also raised above the general surface level about a foot and a half; and in length and breadth were somewhat in excess of that in the second group.*

In a recent popular work on Illinois history it is stated that "A singular monument of this latter race (Mound Builders) is found in the lead region, situated at the summit of a ridge, near the east bank of Sinsinawa creek. It has the appearance of a huge animal, the head, ears, nose, legs and tail, as well as the general outlines, being as perfectly conceived as if made by men versed in modern art. The ridge upon which it has been upbuilt tops an open prairie and stands 300 feet wide, 100 feet in height and rounded off at the top by a thick deposit of clay. Centrally, along the line of the summit, is an embankment three feet high, forming the outline of a quadruped measuring 250 feet from tip of the nose to end of the tail and having, at the center, a width of body of 18 feet. The head was 35 feet long, the ears 10, legs 60 and tail 75. The curvature of the limbs was natural to an animal lying upon its side. In general, the figure resembles the now extinct quadruped known to science as the *megatherium*. Many scientists believe this animal actually lived in and roamed over the Illinois plains when these ancient Mound Builders first entered the valley of the Mississippi, and that this outline was later drawn from memory."†

Though very desirous to obtain an accurate drawing of this monument, I unfortunately utterly failed, after the most diligent inquiry, to discover its location. Several intelligent citizens of JoDaviess county, on being interviewed—some of whom were born and raised on the banks of Sinsinawa creek—said they had never before heard of such a mound, and, of course, knew nothing about it. But there is, four miles east of Galena, the strangest and best defined effigy mound in Illinois, which has to the present escaped the attention of all antiquarian writers, and which in scarcely any particular corresponds with the one above described. It is on the farm of Mr. J. F. Leekley, occupying a level space on the top of a ridge rising 300 feet above the waters of Fever river. In configuration it bears some resemblance to a horse, Plate III, and for that reason is known locally

*The Archaeologist, Waterloo, Indiana, 1894. Vol. II, pages 85-89.

†Historic Illinois. By Randall Parish. Chicago, A. C. McClurg & Co. 1906. pp. 20-21.

PLATE II.

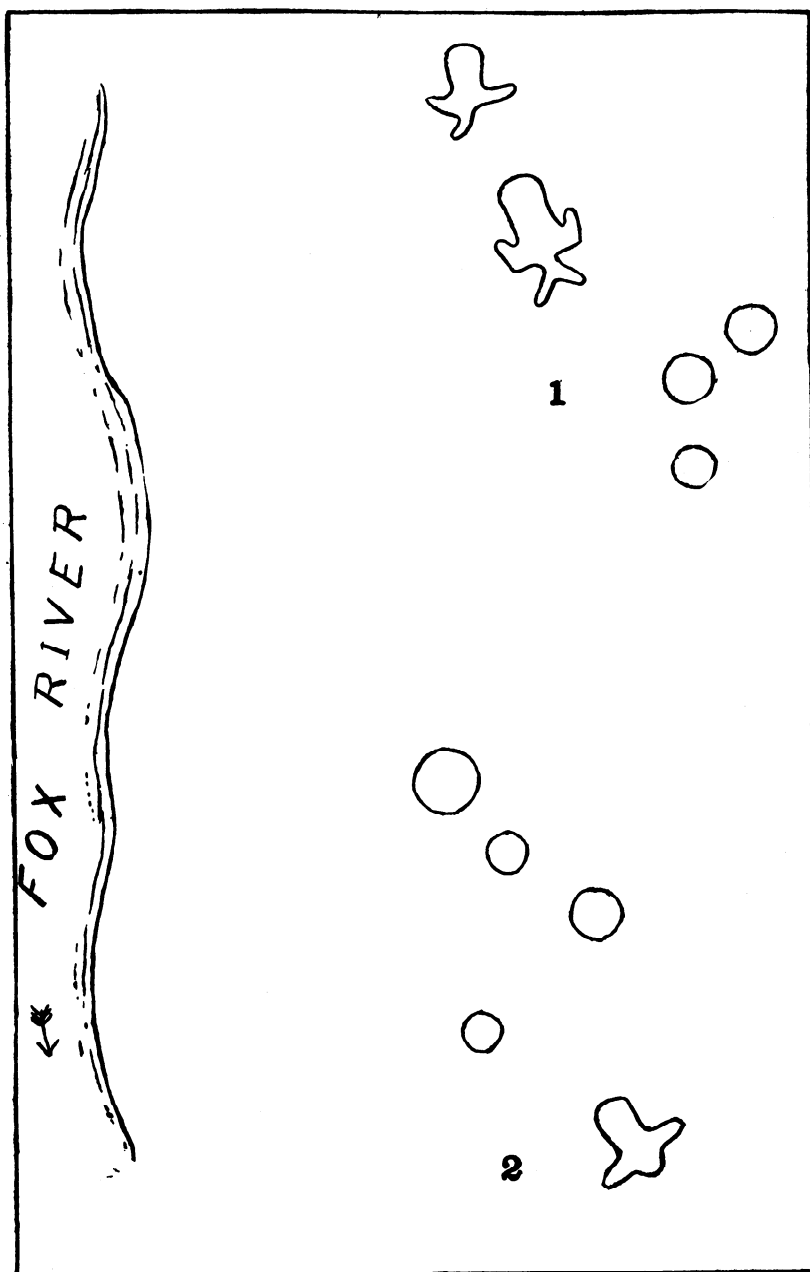
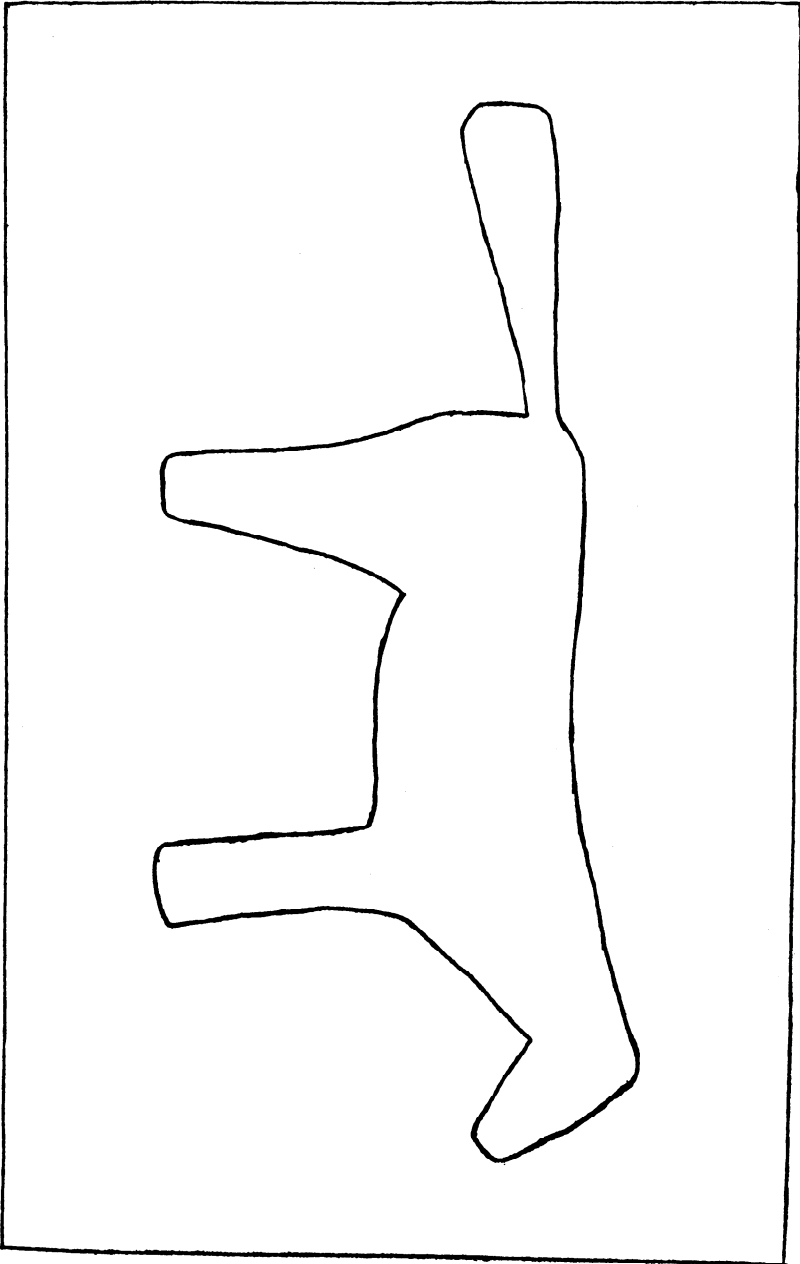


PLATE III.



as the "Horse mound." Its total length, from the forehead to the end of the tail, is 195 feet, the body is 116 feet, the tail 50 feet long and 14 feet wide at its broadest part, the head is 25 feet and the neck 29 feet long, measured from the breast of the figure to its lower jaw. The hind legs are 45 and the front legs 42 feet in length, the distance from the one to the other being 75 feet. The widest part of the body is 30 feet and its elevation at the shoulders 6 feet. The material of which it is composed is arenaceous clay, the drift, or subsoil of all that region.

This wonderful work of the aborigines is near the center of the level area on the ridge, which for many years has been in cultivation and was last season (1908) covered with a heavy growth of corn. And though worn down somewhat by the plow, it still stands in bold relief with all marginal lines sharply defined.

There may yet be more of the effigiated mounds of this type—that in the political division of the northwest into states have fallen within the confines of Illinois—than those described in the preceding pages. Raised but slightly above the surface, and in some instances overgrown with trees and bushes, their artificial contour and elevation have perhaps escaped detection. And no doubt there have been others within the same territory entirely destroyed by the rapacious encroachments of civilization. With one or two exceptions, no efforts have been made to preserve those now well known; nor has any intelligent investigation of them for the benefit of science been undertaken.

Earthen mounds, undoubtedly artificial, projected on huge scales and plainly imitative of common indigenous animals, are well calculated to incite surprise and profound interest. Their inspection irresistibly suggests the inquiries: What was their purpose? Who made them? The candid answer to which must be, we do not know. Until a few decades ago they were attributed to a mysterious, mythical people, styled Mound Builders, that long since mysteriously and unaccountably disappeared. It is now known that the Mound Builders were simply American Indians. But with our present limited knowledge—or, rather, absolute ignorance—of the habits, customs and methods of life of the primitive race of Indians, any attempt to specify what particular tribe of them built certain kinds of mounds, and the specific purpose for which they built them, obviously must be largely a matter of conjecture.

Yet, reasoning by analogy from what we do know of the tribal institutions and culture of modern Indians, rational conclusions may be deduced in some degree explanatory of the meaning of those earthworks in eccentric forms, which otherwise would appear to be aimless and purposeless freaks. Assuming that that class of mounds were intended by their projectors to portray birds and other animate objects, the legitimate and unavoidable inference is that their design was to represent the various totems of a tribe.

As is well known, the social organization of the American Indians, with some exceptions, was founded, not upon the family, but upon

the gens, totem or clan, as the tribal unit. "The gens," says Major Powell, "is an organized body of consanguineal kindred," or kinfolk, that elect their own sub-chief and "decide all questions of property, and especially of blood revenge, within its own limits. Several gentes may, and often do, unite in phrates, or brotherhoods, within the tribe."* Each gens was designated by the name of a familiar object, usually that of some species of bird, quadruped or reptile; as, the wolf gens, or that of the turtle, bear, eagle, lizard, etc. Without graphic characters to express or record their language, each gens adopted the picture or image of the animal chosen for its emblem as its distinct designation. Consequently, as many of the customs and tribal regulations of recent Indians are derived, and were perpetuated, from their ancient ancestors, it is a reasonable presumption that the builders of the effigy mounds made them for symbols to mark the range or location, or to commemorate noted achievements of their respective gens; or, in many instances, as specialized monuments to the memory of their gentile dead interred in nearby sepulchral mounds.

It must be admitted, however, that no one of these hypotheses—or all together—furnish an infallible keynote to the intent of all the earthen images in question. The many lengthy linear mounds; the multitude of uncouth, anomalous structures resembling no known animate or inanimate object; the mysterious figures in intaglio (sunk in the ground, instead of being raised above it); the headless reptilian forms, are wholly inscrutable enigmas. I have heretofore offered tentatively the suggestion that the latter class were originally supplied with heads made of perishable materials;† but their great numbers militate against that supposition. It may not be improbable, however, that a decapitated alligator, or iguana, was adopted as the clan's escutcheon because of some incident occurring in its early history.

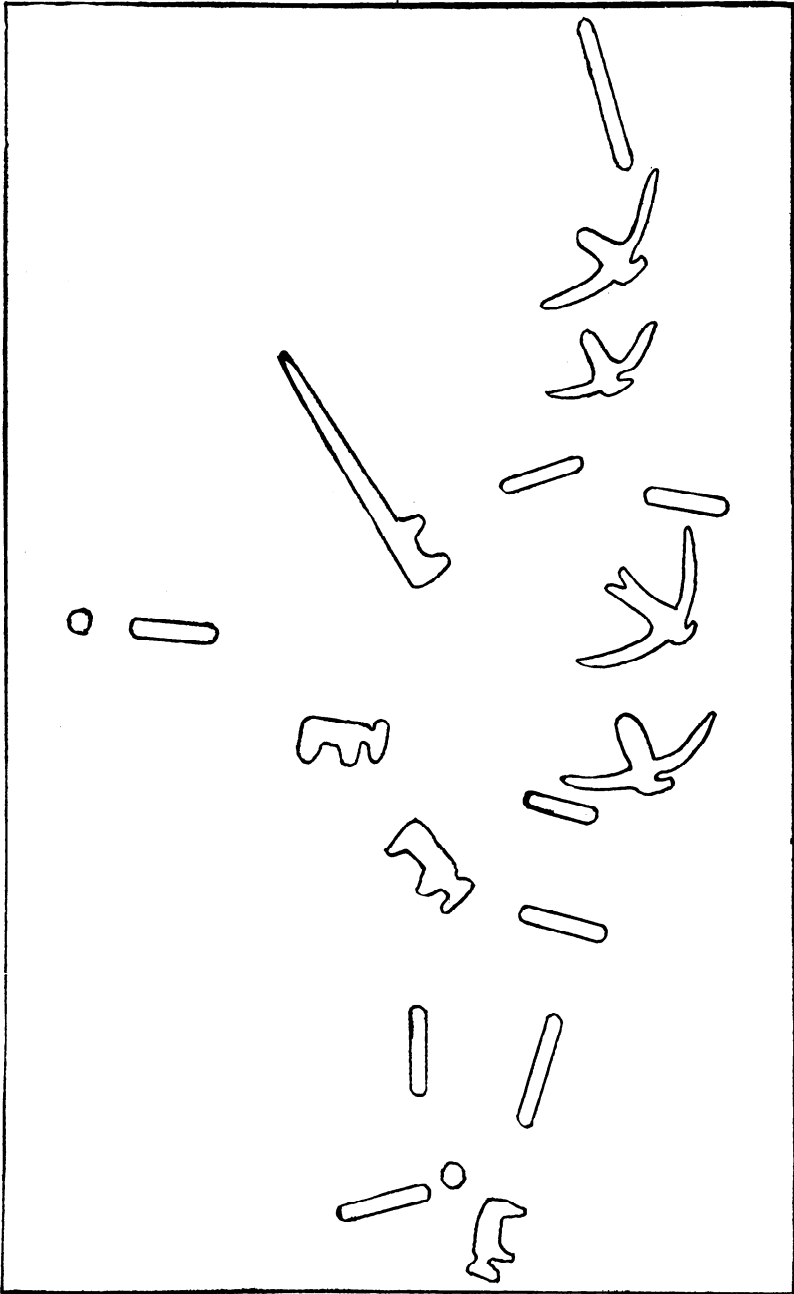
Mr. R. C. Taylor, who was among the first reliable observers to bring the Wisconsin animal mounds into public notice, in 1838, suggested "that their forms were intended to designate the cemeteries of the respective tribes or families (of Indians) to which they belonged; thus, the tribe, clan or family possessing as its characteristic totem, blazon or emblem, the bear, constructed the burial place of its members in the form of that animal; the clans having the panther, turtle, eagle or other animal or object for their totems, respectively, conforming to the same practice."‡ Mr. Taylor, as has since been proven, was in error in his belief that the adumbrant figures were themselves the cemeteries. They were but the indices thereto. It is true that human remains have been found in some of the Wisconsin effigy mounds. A large proportion of them were undoubtedly intrusive burials by later Indians; but many of them were surely primal deposits of bodies, or bundled skeletons, on the original surface of the ground.

*The American Race. Daniel S. Brinton, A. M., M. D., New York, 1891. Page 46.

†Transactions of the Illinois State Historical Society, 1900. Page 25.

‡Silliman's Journal of Science and Art, 1838. Vol. XXXIV, page 91.

PLATE IV.



Those later burials, it may be, were at first in the conventional conical mounds, which subsequently were, by addition of more drift clay, enlarged into the form of the totemic effigy. Mr. Lapham says: "Indeed, the animal-shaped mounds have never been found productive in ancient relics or works of art. It was probably for purposes other than the burial of the dead that these structures were made."*

Of all the mounds in the United States of Indian architecture, comparatively few are constructed of the surface soil upon which they stand, excepting when built upon clay formations, such as the river bluffs, or upon sand, as in Florida and other localities. Clay was almost invariably selected for mound structure by the aborigines, and in many instances was conveyed long distances for that purpose. Some of the effigy mounds in southwestern Wisconsin are made of sand, and an exceptional number of them of river bottom loam; but by far the greater number—as well as those in Illinois—are composed of the drift clay subsoil.† This feature of mound building will be again adverted to in the parts of this paper that are to follow.

All known effigy mounds in Illinois are so projected as to appear traveling southward. There can be no doubt that they were so placed intentionally, and not simply to conform with topical surroundings; but with what significance, if any, is impossible to determine. In the great mass of analogous works in Wisconsin no attention was paid to orientation of the raised images, as the heads and tails of those having such appendages point indiscriminately to various points of the compass. Plate IV, a modified copy of the fifty-first plate of Mr. Lapham's treatise, illustrates a group of animal mounds on a high ridge dividing the Kickapoo and Mississippi rivers, in southwestern Wisconsin.

It cannot be claimed that the builders of the effigy mounds were gifted in very high degree with what Ruskin styles the "art instinct." The technique of their work is crude, coarse and clumsy, with no regularity or order and little regard for relative proportion or accuracy of detail. There is manifest design in the earthen images, but not one of them is so artistically perfect that the bird, quadruped or reptile intended to be imitated can be recognized with certainty, and many of them are but caricatures that bear no likeness to any living thing now known in that region. It is strange that savages evincing such admirable mechanical skill in manufacturing pottery and stone implements should display so little fidelity to nature in their efforts to copy the forms of animals they were daily associated with and knew so well. Time and investigation have dispelled much of the glamour that, a generation or two ago, lent to those curious Indian mounds of Wisconsin a magnified import. The colossal "signs of the cross," in conspicuous relief on the sloping ridges there, gazed upon with reverent amazement as indisputable evidence of the pre-Columbian introduction of Christianity on this continent, are now known

*Antiquities of Wisconsin. By I. A. Lapham. Smithsonian Contribution to Knowledge, Washington, 1886. Page 16.

†Ibid. Page 92.

—as are also the famous man-shaped mounds—to be but awkward attempts to portray birds in flight. The marvelous “Elephant mound” in Grant county, cited by embryo scientists as proof positive of the contemporaneous existence here of man and the mastodon, is now conceded to be only a rude image of the bear, the wind having accidentally drifted loose sand so as to lengthen its nose into the semblance of a proboscis. But yet, with their many imperfections and defects, the effigy mounds are among the most extraordinary and interesting of American antiquities.

Their age is still a question in controversy, and perhaps will always be. The origin of artificial mounds in America, shrouded in fascinating mystery, was accorded remote antiquity as long as the “Mound Builders” were generally believed to have been an occult, semi-civilized race, distinct from, and far superior to, the invading Indians, by whom they were supposedly vanquished and exterminated. But since the researches of archæologists have positively demonstrated that the Indians here when America was discovered, and the immediate ancestors of those Indians were, in fact, the builders of the mounds and artisans of the Stone Age, not only has American archæology lost much of its olden charm, but the chronology of mound building has experienced a surprising revision, the age pendulum swinging from the dim past to the verge of the present era. Recognized authorities in the science of ethnology now teach that the historic Cherokees built all the mounds, the Shawnees made all the stone-lined graves, and the Winnebagos were the authors of the effigy mounds of Wisconsin! It will not be surprising to be next informed that the Apaches carved the Calendar stone and the Yaquis erected the Reotihuacan pyramids of the Sun and the Moon!

This statement, however, is not intended to intimate that the early Cherokees did *not* build mounds or the primitive Shawnees bury their dead in stone-lined graves. They, as well as other Indians, no doubt did, having inherited those customs from their ancestors. But very little evidence has yet been adduced in support of the assumption that the Winnebagos fashioned the effigy mounds, or knew anything of the Indians who did make them. When the Winnebagos were asked by the first white settlers in Wisconsin who made the effigy mounds, they answered: “We do not know. They have always been here.” When the same question was asked by the Jesuit missionaries of the Indians then in that locality, they answered: “The Great Manitou made them as a sign to His children that this region abounded with game.”

An argument of the “modernists” is that Siouian Indians—inferentially the Winnebagos—in recent times constructed, out on the north-western plains, of loose boulders, effigies similar to those in lower Wisconsin. The Sioux and Dakotas, it is true, often designed, on the prairies, with small contiguous boulders, various odd figures in outline, having, however, not the slightest resemblance or affinity to the Wisconsin effigies. They were, as shown by T. H. Lewis and others, simply graphic characters conveying information of the moving

party to others of the tribe who were to follow or who chanced to pass that way. Again, it is asserted the Winnebagos reproduced, with paint, the effigy mound figures on dressed buffalo skins. This is a mistake. The paintings on their buffalo robes were of the same import as those of all other hunter Indians of the west, pictographs recounting the prowess and great achievements of the robe's owner in war and the chase, with occasionally a tribal emblem for personal identification.

Obviously the "Horse mound" on the Leekley farm is of importance in this discussion; for if it is absolutely certain the structure was intended to represent the horse, it must be conceded a modern production, as the horse was not known here prior to 1536. It follows, then, that if that horse mound has no higher antiquity than three and a half centuries, the other effigy mounds of the Wisconsin system are little, if any, older. Therefore, if the Winnebagos were in that region that long ago, the contention that they were the effigy builders, and that the horse was one of their gentile symbols, must be materially strengthened. But was the so-called horse mound designed for an image of the horse? As before remarked, those effigy makers, as artists or molders in clay, were egregious bunglers. None of their earthen images can with certainty be identified. Mr. Lapham was unable to determine whether one of their commonest figures was that of a lizard or a war club. Considering the absence of ears and the broad, trowel-like tail of the mound image on the Leekley farm, notwithstanding its disproportionate length of legs and neck, it was doubtless devised for a totem of the beaver gens, and is therefore of the same unknown age of the other works.

With exception of the Eskimos, a recent intrusive people, both American continents when discovered were populated by only one race, the American race, since known as Indians. There is no evidence whatever that any other human race had previously existed here. There is, therefore, no proof required to maintain the Indian authorship of the mounds and other art remains of prehistoric times in America. The age, or ages, of those remains is altogether conjectural. But the oldest will probably not exceed eight or ten centuries prior to the landing of Columbus on San Salvador; the greater number of them, perhaps not the half of that period. The degree of cultural advancement of the American race from the beginning of the mound building epoch to its close can only be surmised; but there is little reason to believe that the builders of the most ancient mounds in the United States were physically or mentally far different from the Indians found here by De Soto and other early European explorers. Some of them had then become somewhat sedentary, depending as much on agriculture for subsistence as upon the chase; but war was the principal pursuit of all. Wars of extermination, the absorption of weak tribes by the strong, frequent changing of tribal names and locations, was their life history. Mr. Lapham says: "Since the red men have become known to us, numerous tribes have become extinguished, with all their peculiar customs and institutions; yet, as

a whole, the Indian remains. Many tribes have been overrun by others and have united with them as one people. Migrations have taken place; one tribe acquiring sufficient power has taken possession of the lands belonging to another and maintaining its possession. In the course of these revolutions it is not strange that habits and practices, once prevalent in certain places with certain tribes, should become extinct and forgotten."*

The Winnebagos were first seen by the Jesuit fathers near the mouth of the Fox river of Green Bay, and were then known as Ouimpegonec, or Ouimibegoutz. They were of the Sioux or Dakota stock, and called themselves Ho-chun-ga-ra, or the "trout nation," and had come from the western ocean, or salt water. Moving southward down Rock river, they came upon the territory of the Illini, who strenuously resented their encroachment, and after years of warfare, finally checked their further advance.† They, however, held possession of the Rock river valley as far down as within forty miles of its junction with the Mississippi until the Black Hawk war in 1832.

Neither space nor the scope of this paper permit prolonged discussion of the very little that is known concerning the origin of the effigy mounds. Within the historic era the territory they occupy has been alternately in the possession—in whole or in part—of the Mascoutins, Kickapoos, Sauks and Foxes, Chippewas and Winnebagos,‡ all of whom enclosed their dead in conical mounds, until they learned by contact with the whites to dig graves; and they all believed the effigy mounds to be natural elevations that had "always been there."

The most reasonable conclusion warranted by the meagre data obtainable is that the building of effigy mounds in Wisconsin and Illinois was a custom of indigenous inception and growth—for it cannot be traced to an extraneous source—of a small tribe of Indians enjoying a century or more of comparative quietude, then finally overrun, partially exterminated, and the survivors absorbed by a predatory incoming branch of the "Siouan" stock, the building of earthen images abruptly ceased and identity of their builders was soon lost.

*Antiquities of Wisconsin. Pages 29-30.

†The Illinois and Indiana Indians. By Hiram W. Beckwith, Chicago. Fergus Printing Co., 1884. Page 138.

‡Antiquities of Wisconsin, I. A. Lapham. Page 61.